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Stabilizing the population requires action at all levels



"If we in the U.S. can ... see the broader world need to stem the population tide that threatens to drown us all, our country can still play a valuable and pivotal role.... We have the necessary financial and technical resources to help. All we need is the political will."

— George Mitchell, U.S. Senate majority leader

Next week the United Nation's International Conference on Population and Development will begin in Cairo, Egypt. Hopefully, world leaders there will approve a 20-year plan to stabilize world population.

The U.S. is ready to take a leading role at the Cairo conference. Although our lack of leadership at pre-

vious conference has been largely due to politics, another factor is the perception in the United States that population is not a problem.

In the past decade, U.S. residents gradually have awakened to the effects of rapid population growth and to the social and environmental costs of failing to address population issues.

"We are paying the toll for the ardent resistance and hostility of past administrations to family planning and the many other components needed in a sound population strategy," wrote Susan Weber of Zero Population Growth. "Birth and fertility rates are back to baby-boom levels. And a shocking 60 percent of all U.S.

pregnancies are unintended."

"Worse still, every 67 seconds, another American teenager gives birth. In fact, U.S. teen pregnancy rates are No. 1 among highly industrialized countries and even rival some developing nations. These young mothers face fewer educational and job opportunities and a continuing cycle of poverty for themselves and their children. Beyond the overwhelming personal costs, taxpayers are spending an estimated \$30 billion every year to support families begun by teenagers."

We are also beginning to see the toll that population growth takes on our country's environment. "Population pressures are being felt right now," wrote Ben Hren, director of the Carrying Capacity project for the Izaak Walton League.

"For example, New England coastal waters are closed to fishing as overharvested species, many of which went to overseas markets, struggle to recover. In Canada, continued development of the huge James Bay hydroelectric project, de-

signed in part to sell power to the northeastern United States, drowned some of the richest wildlife and waterfowl habitat in North America and contaminated aquatic life with toxic mercury. Runaway urban growth in the Los Angeles basin is causing high levels of pollution nearly 300 miles away in the Grand Canyon, a crown jewel in the nation's park system."

Many of us feel overwhelmed by the global population problem and believe there is nothing we can do. Not so. There are several actions you can take to help stabilize population.

■ Educate yourself. The library has several good books on population growth. "Beyond the Limits" by Donella H. Meadows and "The Population Explosion" by Paul and Anne Ehrlich are two excellent books on the subject.

■ Educate others. Inform your children, friend and family about the effects of population growth and what actions they can take.

■ Join an organization that is working on population issues. Zero Population Growth and the Carrying Ca-

capacity Network are two. Write to Zero Population Growth at 1400 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036, and to Carrying Capacity Network, at 1325 G Street N.W., Suite 1003, Washington, D.C., 20005-3104.

■ Limit your family size to one or two children and encourage others to do the same.

■ Lobby for increased government support of family planning in the U.S. and abroad.

■ Adopt a child instead of reproducing.

If you have a suggestion for a column, a gripe, a success story or whatever, write it down and send it to me, care of the Columbia Daily Tribune, PO Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.